



Participation of developing countries in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) process: Bangladesh case study¹

Partha Sarker, March 2006

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INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh: (Facts and figures)

- Bangladesh is a landmass of agricultural and riverine delta and is approximately 147,570 square kilometers in size.
- It is one of the densely populated countries (1024 persons per sq km) in the World, with its population reaching more than 133 million, 36% of which live under the poverty line i.e under a dollar per day. (Data Source: World Bank Fact Sheets 2002).
- Bangladesh stands 139th in human development index (as per UN Human Development Report 2005) although the country has made significant progress in some indicators such as, life expectancy, school enrolment for female children, population growth rate reduction, adult literacy etc.
- The country has also achieved near self-sufficiency in food production and made progress in improving its capacity to manage natural disasters with annual GDP growth averaging 5 percent since 1991.
- It has parliamentary democracy where parliament is the legislative body and enjoys sovereign rights.
- ICT is already declared as the thrust sector by the government and a National ICT Task Force headed by the Prime Minister leads the ICT initiatives in the country. Government has enacted Copyright Act 2000 (amended in 2004), National ICT Policy 2002, IT Act 2004 (Electronic Transaction), National telecom policy 1998 etc. Bangladesh Telecom Regulatory Commission (BTRC) has been established in 2002.
- ICT penetration in the country is not high but is expanding day by day. Number of PCs per 100 inhabitants is: 0.34, Internet users per 100 inhabitants is: 0.15, cell phone subscribers per 100 inhabitants is: 0.81, total telephone subscribers per 100 inhabitants is: 1.32 ((ITU 2002). There were 150 registered ISP license holders working in different parts of the country by the end of 2003.

METHODOLOGY

We used different methodologies in order to envisage the country case study. These include:

- reports of meetings
- press reports
- interviews with government officials, private sector and civil society ICT personnel;
- interviews with participants in WSIS meetings
- other sources appropriate to the country.

Data, statistics and quotes are refereed to appropriate sources. Views or comments expressed by the interview respondents are used in this report with their consent. We distributed an initial list of questionnaire, which for many cases was reviewed by telephone conversations. We also consulted WSIS official documents and other relevant papers, declaration, documents etc. Research on documents or outcomes provided the substance or summary to the process while the interviews provided the much-needed feedback on how the process evolved and what feedback or contribution it attributed from individual, organization or government.

- C. National/International policymaking process concerning WSIS, including:
 - i. an account of what happened, plus
 - ii. analysis of:
 - 1. government policymaking
 - 2. multistakeholder participation
 - 3. priorities and outcomes
 - 4. report-back and follow-up
 - 5. civil society engagement (this needs to be a substantial separate account from the above)
 - 6. private sector engagement
 - 7. Relationship of WSIS process to other international ICT decision-making processes in-country.

The UN General Assembly, on 21 December 2001, adopted a Resolution (A/RES/56/183) endorsing the organization to convene the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) under the patronage of the United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan. It also allowed International Telecommunication Union (ITU) to take the lead role in preparing the summit along with other interested UN organizations and host countries. The governing body of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the Council, at its 2001 session, endorsed the holding of the summit in two phases: in Geneva from 10-12 December 2003 and in Tunis from 16-18 November 2005.

Bangladesh being an ITU member was informed about this summit but the government's response or action to the process was rather late or inadequate at that time. Instead an NGO, Bangladesh Friendship Education Society (BFES – <http://www.bfes.net>) first organized a conference on 'Building a Knowledge Society: The Role of NGOs' in January 2002 with participation of different stakeholders that articulated the need for Bangladesh to make greater engagement with WSIS processes. Please see the report of this conference at: <http://www.amadergram.org/images/report.pdf>

Earlier the new government of Bangladesh, that came to power in October, 2001 declared 'ICT' as a thrust sector and renamed the Ministry of Science and Technology as the Ministry of Science and Information and Communication Technology in March, 2002. In May/June 2002, Bangladesh government representatives attended a capacity building workshop organized by Asian Development Bank Institute in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia. This is where the government team gets closer to Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP) and the chair of both GKP and SDC (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation) invited Bangladesh Government to be a member of GKP.

Few months later, in September 2002, GKP organized South Asia Regional meeting in Dhaka and Bangladesh government was the co-host of this meeting. The conference was attended by national and international policy makers, NGOs, civil society members and experts. The meeting accommodated a special session on WSIS where the participants discussed about WISS issues in Bangladesh. And the conference was supplementary to the WSIS global process as a reflection to country consultation. Please find more information of this regional meeting at: http://202.144.202.75/gkps_portal/index.cfm?menuid=106&parentid=92

First preparatory committee meeting of WSIS on July 2002 in Geneva, discussed about the participation of non-governmental actors in the negotiating process and who should have right to take part in discussing them.

Knowing the fact that civil society groups have already got engaged with WSIS processes, Bangladesh Government in October, 2002 formed a 'Working Group on WSIS' with representatives from relevant governmental ministries, private sectors, media and civil society (who were active or interested on information society issues) and made the Ministry of Science and Information and Communication Technology (MOSICT- <http://www.mosict.gov.bd/>) as the Focal Point for WSIS activities in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh Working Group on WSIS had a Secretariat based in Bangladesh Telecom Regulatory Commission (BTRC) office in Dhaka. This Secretariat hosted 11 meetings in total with private sectors, chambers of commerce, media and NGOs/civil society organizations. The group also worked out next steps on the basis of the official document prepared by the WSIS Executive Secretariat.

In December 2002, the working group organized a national round table consultation with different stakeholders including a selective number of civil society organizations, government representatives, private sector entities etc. Member-secretary of WSIS working group (in Bangladesh) who is also a representative from an NGO attended Asia Pacific Regional WSIS meeting in January 2003 and presented the outcomes of this national consultation to that regional meeting.

First call for WSIS working group

Bangladesh Working Group on World Summit on the Information Society Formed!

Bangladesh Working group on WSIS (World Summit on the Information Society) has been formed with Chairperson Syed Marghub Murshed, Chairman, Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission and Co-Chairperson Dr. Mizanur Rahman Shelley, Chairman, Center for Development Research Bangladesh (CDRB) and Karar Mahmudul Hasan, Secretary, Ministry of Science and ICT, Government of Bangladesh. Reza Salim, Associate Director of Bangladesh Friendship Education Society (BFES) will act as Member-secretary and AHM Bazlur Rahman, Chief Executive Officer, Bangladesh Coastal NGOs Network for Radio & Communication (BCNNRC), and Ahmed Swapan Mahmud, Executive Director, VOICE will act as members for the Group. The Group will arrange consultation meetings on ICT and Development, and work to formulate a position paper for Bangladesh to address the WSIS process in Asia PrepCom to be held in Japan and finally the summit held in Switzerland in 2003. For more information: www.geneva2003.org

One of the limitations of this working group was that it was not fully inclusive and open to many other organizations that could be prospective stakeholders to WSIS

processes. First of all, this working group was formed without any call to join the network. Second, it did not keep any mechanism where it could accommodate prospective stakeholders with the time. Private sector was insufficiently represented in the working group. Interestingly, some of the major NGOs such as, Grameen Bank or BRAC who also have stake on ICT areas, had little or no participation to the WSIS activities in the country.

Outcomes of national consultation meeting held in National Press Club, Dhaka and organized by WSIS working group in Bangladesh:

Bangladesh has properly emphasizes **connectivity**. It properly gives attention to the growing digital divide in the world and within the country as well. The digital divide has been growing between men and women, between urban and rural, between rich and poor, between literate and illiterate, between social and corporate sector. To reduce the gaps the digital opportunity can properly be utilized. And Bangladesh Government is giving proper emphasize to introduce information and communication technology at all levels.

In regarding connectivity, the role of both print and electronic **media** was emphasized. Both the media should play the role promoting and ensuring social responsibility rather than making profit only. The media can play important role disseminating information and communication technology and its benefits to the community because ICT can play vital role generating employment and building human resources.

The process also highlights to build up a **Knowledge Society** by facilitating access to information and giving proper training and orientation to build up a skill human resource. It also gives importance to local knowledge and resources mainly concentrating to promote and preserve indigenous knowledge of the community.

Community media requires proper attention formulating policies and implementation. Especially, community broadcasting e.g. community radio and community tele-centre can be set up at rural levels to ensure participation which will ensure access to information and thus building a knowledge society. Simultaneously, it facilitates accountable governance by participating people at decision-making process, at planning and management level.

Telecommunications is also an important sector that needs to be decentralized. The monopoly in the sector should be withdrawn and ensure service and facilities properly both at urban and rural levels. According to the ITU convention 10 per cent telephones should be allocated to rural level that government would try to ensure to reduce the gap exists.

The **poor and marginalized groups, ethnic groups, disable and illiterate groups** of the society should be prioritized with proper attention including people at all levels.

Source: <http://www.itu.int/wsis/docs/pc2/misc/bfes.pdf>

MOSICT on the other hand arranged a series of inter-ministerial and departmental meetings to prepare a list of inter-sessional inputs and contribution to the Draft Declaration and on Plan of Action during Prepcom 2 and 3 of the first phase of the summit. Much of its suggestions such as, recognizing to special needs of developing countries for IPR regime, market access for developing countries or the concern on ethical guideline etc. were mingled in the original text of final Declaration and Plan of Action that were adopted in the Summit. The text of the inputs that Bangladesh Government provided is as follows:

Bangladesh Government believes that:

- Widespread use of ICT in global trade and commerce activities should be promoted for greater access of developing countries into the world markets;
- The global IPR regime should also recognize the special needs of developing countries. The developing countries should themselves be aware in safeguarding their diversified indigenous cultural and linguistic contents [as common vision];
- Developing countries should have greater access to global market and trade information through international trade information networks and trade portals [access to information and knowledge];
- Developing countries will need more international support to enhance market access for their ICT products and services, help in product development and research, and to increase investment by global ICT sectors from developed countries [the role of public, private and civil society in promotion of ICT4D];
- Both proprietary and open source software and applications should be taken into consideration for greater flexibility and minimizing cost. To create a favorable market atmosphere for private sector investment we need to ensure the development of suitable market incentives. Special emphasis should be put in creating a beneficial environment from SMEs to operate in the networked economy which will be of particular importance for faster economic of all countries in the world [equal opportunity for all];
- To bridge the Digital Divide specific attention should be given to ICT education and training for the youth. ICT enabled education and educational courses on ICTs for youth – both are equal increasing importance for capacity and human development measures in the global south [capacity building];
- Facilitating the young entrepreneurs with seed funding and business advisory support so that they can reap the tremendous benefits that can be achieved from the ICT4D [ICT applications];

Specific recommendations on Draft Declaration of Principles:

At 5 (34) please add **highlighted** words and read as:

“An adequately developed infrastructure **and a set of ethical guidelines** is a precondition for secure and reliable access to information by all stakeholders and for the upgrading of relevant services”.

At 9 (52) please add an additional Para as:

Protecting countries from bad affects of misuse of ICT: Policies regarding use of ICT must respect the laws, interest and readiness of other members and no entity should be allowed to reach into any contract with an illegal entity or with a legal entity on a matter for which it is not allowed.

Source: http://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-s/md/03/wsispc3/c/S03-WSISPC3-C-0070!!PDF-E.pdf

One of the critical issues of discussions at the third prepcom meeting of the first summit phase was to create digital solidarity fund, a proposal that has been put forward by the President of Senegal, Abdoulaye Wade. Bangladesh like many other developing countries supported the creation of this fund. Prime Minister of Bangladesh was among the high level dignitaries (from Bangladesh) who joined the WSIS Summit in Geneva in 2003 and the working group coordinated Prime Minister's visit to WSIS Summit in Geneva. In her speech to the summit she also reiterated the position of digital solidarity fund. The text of the speech is copied below.

Her Excellency Begum Khaleda Zia
Hon'ble Prime Minister
People's Republic of Bangladesh
GENEVA-PALEXPO
Switzerland
11 December 2003

Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be part of this occasion as we gather here in Geneva, to lay foundations of the Information Society. This noble cause.

Information Technologies have profound changes in human society. These differ from social transformations caused by earlier scientific advances. The invention of the telegraph in the early 19th century started the modern Information Technology. By the 21st century we are witness to a dramatic new wave of IT, leading to massive socio-economic changes.

Information Technology has significant advantages over past industrial technologies. Its impact goes beyond the developed world and extends to developing countries as well. It has opened up vast new opportunities for them, unlike past technology.

Information Technology demands very modest investment. It does not degrade the environment. Information Technology requires only one ingredient to become productive, namely human intellect. The technology becomes cheaper as it develops itself. Also, while their cost declines progressively, their uses multiply at a faster rate. These fundamental differences have created conditions for us to leapfrog underdevelopment.

Bangladesh has placed poverty alleviation on the top of its development agenda. It is here that ICT has a critical role to play. It is for developing countries and especially the least developed among them to seize the opportunity and adopt ICT as a priority tool to fight hunger, malnutrition, illiteracy, discrimination against women, children, aged and disabled. The need to invest in ICT infrastructure and especially ICT human resources is paramount.

Excellencies,

I am happy that our national policy on ICT conforms closely with the outcomes of the documents we intend to endorse in Geneva. Our aim is to build an ICT driven nation comprising a knowledge-based society by the year 2006. We hope to establish a country-wide ICT infrastructure that will ensure access to information by all our citizens. This will both empower people and enhance democratic values. It will also facilitate sustainable economic development, governance, e-commerce, banking, public utility services and a variety of on-line ICT enabled services.

Excellencies,

The challenges faced by poorer countries to build an Information Society are formidable. The complexity of the issues is compounded by a lack of resources and ICT infrastructure. This came up in the Preparation Committee meetings leading to the two outcomes, namely the Principles and Plan of Action. I am happy that the world community has shown flexibility and remarkable will in adopting them.

Excellencies,

We live in an asymmetric world marked by wealth and poverty. The digital divide has widened the development gap. However, I believe that we have now devised a technology that can overcome these differences and lead to a global society with minimum poverty and maximum equity. We must, indeed, resolutely commit ourselves to build the Information Society and implement our Plan of Action.

In this regard, the need for both regional and international cooperation_ is vital. This is necessary to overcome financial obstacles that impede access to ICT. There is also a need for greater support and cooperation programmes from International Financial Institutions. Impetus from this World Summit is, therefore, crucial.

I would like to strongly recommend that we create a Digital Solidarity Fund which would inter-alia:

- * Channel technical and financial assistance towards national capacity building;
- * Facilitate transfer and use of technology from developed countries;
- * Assist sharing of knowledge and skills;
- * Develop compatible regulations and standards that respect national characteristics and concerns, including spectrum management.

Excellencies,

Bangladesh Government has been part of LDC (least developed countries) caucus and played an important role into it. Bangladesh wanted representation of LDC countries in the bureau of preparatory committee since WSIS started its processes. But on the first phase of the Summit, it could not make that through while in the Second phase, Bangladesh becomes an important member of the bureau and tried to represent the interests of LDC countries.

Civil society groups in Bangladesh have been part of several caucuses including Asian caucus on civil society, grassroots caucus, media caucus, telecentre caucus, youth caucus etc. According to one source, no Bangladeshi organization was part of gender caucus, as the organizations that work on gender issues have no participation into this event. Even participation to media or youth caucus was limited or was represented irregularly by one or two organization.

Bangladesh Friendship Education Society- BFES (www.bfes.net) has been the most active NGO in Bangladesh in participating and contributing WSIS processes.

BFES has attended both the summit, most of the Prepcoms and regional meetings held in Geneva and elsewhere. BFES has been part of WSIS working group in the country, Asian caucus on civil society, grassroots caucus etc. They also organized ICT for development experience sharing sessions in collaboration with GKP at Geneva summit and in the Prepcom 2 of the 2nd phase of the summit. BFES was assigned (from South Asia) by the Civil Society Asian Group to assist Asia Caucus on Civil Society in drafting or preparing reports or outcomes of the negotiations.

ICT for Development Program in Bangladesh (ICTDPB) (www.seba-bd.org), a project of an NGO SEBA took part some of the sessions at WSIS. ICTDPB was part of telecentre caucus. They participated WSIS Geneva Summit in 2003 and organized a daylong workshop on 'Integrated approach towards bridging digital divide'. In the 2nd phase of the Summit they had a representative to join 1st and 3rd Prepcom and WSIS thematic meeting on 'Ubiquitous Network' in Tokyo.

Development Research Network (D-net- www.d-netbangladesh.org) has been mostly active in the preparatory process of the 2nd phase of the summit and in the Tunis Summit in 2005. D-net has prepared a possible position paper for Bangladesh delegation, which was a helpful contribution to Bangladesh position at WSIS. This position paper is discussed in the later sections of this article.

Reporters Unity – a federation of journalists and reporters in Bangladesh was represented in the PrepCom 3 of the first summit. Computer Jagat, one popular computer magazine in Bangladesh has been a part of youth caucus. Definitely, not all organizations could manage fund or time to go to different meetings of WSIS. Even one organization we heard could not manage to get Swiss visa (from the Swiss Embassy in Bangladesh) despite their contribution to communication rights issue.

In the 'Plan of Action' that later builds 'Geneva Declaration' gives the Government a leading role in developing and implementing e-strategies and also urges private sector and civil society be given equally important role in creating an equitable information society.

Bangladesh Government quickly responded to this call by creating a committee. Ministry of Science and ICT (MOSICT) created this 'committee on implementation of action plan' in January 2004 with representation from Government, private sector entities such as, ISP association, BASIS (Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services), BCS (Bangladesh Computer Samity), FBCCI (Federation of Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry), NGO or civil society such as, BFES & ICTDPB and Media groups such as, ICT Journalist Forum etc.

The committee was formed on top of another WSIS working group and created a bit of overlapping sense as to who was doing what. But it was clear that the working group did not have much presence or activities in the second phase of the Summit. While on the other hand, MOSICT committee sat several times but the only thing that it could do is to prepare a formal input paper on implementation of action plan. One of the interview respondents who was actively involved in both the working group and the MOSICT committee informed that 'the working Group's responsibility was to coordinate the national issues and Government of Bangladesh to provide inputs, develop working and briefing paper, coordinate with ITU and GKP for ICT4D Platform of Geneva phase and to prepare position paper; all were done properly by the working group'.

Features of the operational mechanism of the Watchdog (Proposed by ICTDPB)

The role of the Watchdog will be – monitoring & follow-up of the implementation of the Plan of Action of WSIS.

Assess the country impediments and extend technical assistance to overcome the situation;

The Watchdog will be lead and established by ITU (International Telecommunication Union). Member countries will be invited to cooperate and join the initiative. Terms of Reference will be established for all the tire of the mechanism;

A Central Coordination Committee (CCC) at regional level will be established with participation of regional representation like Asia Pacific, Africa, Latin America etc.;

Strong regional Hub will be appointed with inter-govt. agencies and other stakeholders;

Country level committee will be established and report to the Regional Hub with ICT4D indicators at country level, a participatory team from all stakeholders will be ensured;

Quarterly updates will be available and countries will be informed & notify about their position and advise to upgrade their position;

Interesting to note that, in both the MOSICT Committee and working group, civil society/NGOs were very active and almost drive the course. One of the NGOs, ICTDPB set a proposal to establish a regional or global watchdog to ensure implementation of WSIS Plan of Action and Declaration of Principles set by the first Summit. Main features of their proposal are given in the box hereby.

Anyway, MOSICT seems to be serious in preparing country input paper on action plan implementation to showcase as to what they have done in terms of action plan and declaration of principles. But the activities outlined in the table do not seem to be matching with the meaning of these terms.

For example, building information society does not mean only to prepare policy, ACT or committee; access to information or knowledge does not give any information as to how Government is providing access to scientific and research based knowledge etc. Despite these limitations, Government attempt to prepare this document was a step towards WSIS implementation processes.

| Declaration of Principles | Plan of Action | Bangladesh |
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| <p>An Information Society for All: The key principles for building an inclusive information society that have been agreed by all are:</p> | <p>Action Lines</p> | <p>The Government of Bangladesh has given immense importance to ICT for development for economic growth and poverty reduction. To develop this sector, the government has taken several projects and programs. Bangladesh government has adopted a comprehensive IT Policy. There are also some legal policy adopted such as IPR and an IT act has been enacted. A National ICT Task Force has been set up and is operational. There are several committees working to foster the projects and programs: The Executive Committee of National ICT Task Force, National Committee of Bio Technology, National Council for Science and Technology with an Executive Committee. Five Technical Committees on Crop Bio-Technology, Animal and Fish Bio-Technology, Medical Bio-Technology, Bio-Safety and Bio-Diversity have been formed.</p> |

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| <p>1. The role of governments and all stakeholders in the promotion of ICTs for development: Building a people-centred Information Society is a joint effort, which requires cooperation and partnership among all stakeholders.</p> | <p>1. An effective participation of governments & all stakeholders in the promotion of ICT4D.</p> | <p>Public-Private Partnership: Ministry is closely working in collaboration with the ICT industry, educational institutions for building the technical ICT skills of young people of the country. Need based ICT services including training facility have been identified for mass participation and curriculum has been developed. Bangladesh Computer Council has taken a project titled "Assistance to Secondary Schools for Introducing Computer Course" under which computer and accessories are given to secondary schools and one teacher of those schools are also given ICT training. Taka eighteen crore has been allocated to seven universities to develop human resources through offering Post Graduate Diploma (PGD) in IT so that skilled manpower and trainers are available for ICT development activities. More universities are being brought under this program. The grant is given to these universities to conduct a standard 1 year Post Graduate Diploma Course in ICT. A Bangladesh - Korea Institute of Information and Communication Technology (BKIICT) is being set up at the Bangladesh Computer Council with Technical Assistance of 1 million dollar from Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA). In order to disseminate ICT services including ICT education and training to disperse locations outside the capital Dhaka city, Government has taken up a project 'Conducting Standard Computer Training Courses in the Divisional Headquarters'. Ministry of Science and Information & Communication Technology, in cooperation with the public/private sector, has taken program to produce quality professionals and skilled manpower in ICT to ensure the success of the software and IT Enabled Services (ITES) industries</p> |
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| | | by introducing ICT Internship Award Program in country. |
| <p>2. Information and communication infrastructure: an essential foundation for inclusive information for a well-developed information & communication network infrastructure should be developed with a policies to create a favorable climate for stability, predictability & fair competition at all levels & should be implemented in a manner that will attracts private investment for ICT infrastructure development.</p> | <p>2. Building an Information & communication infrastructure: that is an essential foundation for the Information Society.</p> | <p>Bangladesh is expecting to be connected through optical fiber backbone by the year 2005 which will create an ample scope to develop its IT horizon vigorously. Bangladesh tele-density has been improved quite significantly and mobile connection is expanded the services most of the corners of remote villages. Internet connectivity expanded to the sub-district level. Tk 300 core has been earmarked in Bangladesh Bank as Equity and Entrepreneur fund (EEF) for facilitating the ICT/Software and agro based Industries.</p> |
| <p>3. Access to information and knowledge: The ability for all access and contribute information, ideas and knowledge is essential by removing all barriers and making</p> | <p>3. Access to information and knowledge benefits individuals, organizations and communities to develop.</p> | <p>Scientific Research & Development (R&D) in ICT: Research and development activities in ICT are be strengthened. ICT is being used to spur the development of innovative programs and research in other sectors such as,</p> |

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| <p>affordable access to software, which is an important component of a truly inclusive Information Society.</p> | | <p>agriculture, biotechnology, environment, etc. The Ministry of Science and Information Technology has allocated Tk. 12 core for conducting research in Science, Technology and ICT.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Contributions of Scientific and Industrial Research: Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (BCSIR) is carrying out research on various fields of Research and Development (R&D) related to important sectors of the country such as, agriculture and biotechnology, food and food products, medicine, polymer and natural products, fuel and energy, building materials, applied Physics, Instrument fabrication and chemical products.</p> |
| <p>4. Capacity building: The use of ICTs in all stages of education, training and human resource development should be promoted, taking into account the special needs of persons with disabilities and disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. To achieve a sustainable development of the Information Society, national capability in ICT research and development should be enhanced.</p> | <p>4. Everyone should have the necessary skills to benefit fully from the Information Society. Therefore capacity building and ICT literacy are essential.</p> | <p>Development of Software industry for Local and Export market: Strategies for software industry emphasizes to include increased local utilization of software capabilities, increased earnings through software export, and employment generation. In order to popularize the use & application of computers, the government has exempted custom duties and VAT on computer hardware, software & accessories. This has appreciably increased the computer utilization & doubled the yearly computer growth rate from 20 % to 40 %. Government has offered tax holiday for the IT industry and set up an ICT Incubator to promote the sector. The ICT education could provide young people with opportunities to develop ICT literacy through the education system and / or ICT training facilities, and also provide them with affordable access to computers and the Internet.</p> |

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| <p>5. Building confidence and security in the use of ICTs: Strengthening the trust framework, including information security & network security, authentication, privacy & consumer protection, is a prerequisite for the development of the Information Society & for building confidence among users of ICTs. Spam & cybersecurity should be dealt with at appropriate national and international levels.</p> | <p>5. Building confidence & security in the use of ICTs.</p> | <p>Institutional Frameworks for ICT – Legislative Laws & Regulations: For substantive growth of ICT sector in a shortest time, it is essential to create an enabling environment, appropriate policies and legislative frameworks. The ICT & IPR Law is enacted.</p> |
| <p>6. Enabling environment: An enabling environment at national and international levels is essential for the Information Society. ICTs should be used as an important tool for good governance.</p> | <p>6. To maximize benefits of the Information Society, government need to create a trustworthy, transparent & Non discriminatory legal, regulatory & policy environment.</p> | <p>To develop an enabling environment on Internet use, services and to ensure quality services the government has formulated /adopted related legal and regulatory framework. Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) has established under the Telecommunication Act 2001 to ensure enabling environments for the sector. Mass awareness has been increased which made popular the ICT use at all level.</p> |
| <p>7. ICT applications: benefits in all aspects of life: The usage and deployment of ICTs should seek to create benefits in all aspects of our daily life. ICTs should also contribute to sustainable production and consumption patterns and reduce traditional barriers, providing an opportunity for all to access local and global markets in a more equitable manner.</p> | <p>7. ICT applications can support sustainable development, in the fields of public administration, business, education and training, health, employment, environment, agriculture and science within the framework of</p> | <p>National Portal is under development process to uphold country image worldwide and also by which citizen to government (C to G) relationship is expected to be enhanced.. e-Governance: Governments are using ICT to improve the quality and efficiency of public services delivery systems. To this end ICT may help government strengthen internal information flows, accountability and transparency, and procurement of goods and services.</p> |

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| | national e-strategies. | |
| <p>8. Cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content: The Information Society should harness & preserve cultural heritage for the future by all appropriate methods.</p> | <p>8. Cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content.</p> | <p>Bangladesh has long cultural history and potential of archeological background. The UNESCO declares two World heritages and the International Mother Language day (21 February), which also derived from Bangladesh language movement history.</p> <p>Bangladesh Government is committed to the cultural preservation and shares the information to the world through communication technology. Bangladesh has done the standardization of Unicode compliant Bangla Keyboard and Fonts.</p> |
| <p>9. Media: Our commitment to the principles of freedom of the press and of freedom of information, as well as those of the independence, pluralism and diversity of media, which are essential to the Information Society.</p> | <p>9. Media have an essential role in the development of the Information Society and are recognized as an important contributor to freedom of expression and plurality of information.</p> | <p>Government is considering the Freedom of Press as an important right. Media are also encouraged to collect and publish necessary information related to ICT4D. The electronic and satellite media is encouraged to promote media services worldwide.</p> |
| <p>10. Ethical dimensions of the Information Society: The Information Society should respect peace & uphold the fundamental values of freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, shared responsibility, & respect for nature.</p> | <p>10. It is the responsibility of every state to ensure the ethical dimensions of the Information Society.</p> | <p>Gender Equity: Steps are taken to bridge the ICT gender divide within the country by eradicating factors that restrict equal access to ICT through greater use of both new and traditional ICT as tools for development and for greater voice and empowerment of women. Bangladesh believes in equal right where applicable for disable/disadvantaged group to access the ICT facility.</p> |
| <p>11. International and regional cooperation: The core competences of the ITU</p> | <p>11. International and regional cooperation among all</p> | <p>Bangladesh Foreign Policy is based on friendly relationship with others. Government of Bangladesh is participating in all international</p> |

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| <p>in the fields of ICTs— assistance in bridging the digital divide, international & regional cooperation, radio spectrum management, standards development and the dissemination of information—are of crucial importance for building the Information Society.</p> | <p>stakeholders is vital in implementation of this plan of action and needs to be strengthened with a view to promoting universal access and bridging the digital divide, <i>inter alia</i>, by provision of means of implementation.</p> | <p>and regional activities related to WSIS process. As well as encourages the collaboration and partnership with any private sectors and foreign investments in the field of ICT.</p> |
| <p>Towards WSIS Phase 2 (Tunis)</p> | <p>A preparatory meeting will be held in the first half of 2004 to review those issues of the Information Society, which should form the focus of the Tunis phase of the WSIS, and to agree on the structure of the preparatory process for the second phase.</p> | <p>Bangladesh Government has a WSIS Cell to develop a strategic plan to implement the Plan of Action & Declaration of Principles of WSIS. There is a committee has been formulated with all stakeholders for sharing information, consultation on WSIS and for the preparation for the Tunisia Phase. Chief Executive of the Ministry is leading this process.</p> |

Bangladesh Government presented this input document in Prepcom 1 of Tunis phase of the summit in Hammamet (Tunisia). In this Prepcom Bangladesh was elected as the vice-president of the preparatory committee from the Asian region.

In December 2004, the WSIS working group in Bangladesh organized a consultation meeting in Khulna – a distant port city from the capital Dhaka. This is for the first time any consultation related to WSIS was held outside of Dhaka. But this consultation was rather different from others, as it did not prepare any output document or was aimed for that. Rather the organizers took it as awareness building session and made presentation on WSIS debate and discussion particularly on 'Internet Governance and Financial Mechanism' – two unresolved issues of the Geneva Summit. But it was not clear why the working group organized this consultation only in Khulna but not in other major cities.

Bangladesh Working Group on WSIS in cooperation with APC (www.apc.org) and One World South Asia (southasia.oneworld.net) organized a regional (South Asia) consultation on WSIS issues In January, 2005 and invited participants from the

region. It was a two days event that made some interesting suggestions from regional perspective such as, to establish a regional Internet exchange to connect the national Internet exchanges to contain regional traffic within South Asia or to establish a regional registry for IP address allocations (SANIC) to ensure that IP addresses are fairly distributed in South Asia etc. This regional consultation was attended by many civil society organizations and made recommendations reflecting or echoing the positions of civil societies. The meeting also highlighted some issues of national ICT policy and was critical about the lacks of ICT policy in Bangladesh that the government earlier presented as part of implementation document to 'WSIS Action Plan and Declaration of Principles'. The meeting also emphasized the needs for South Asia policy consultation. The meeting was held prior to the proosed date of SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) Summit which was later postponed. But the idea was to submit these outcomes to the SAARC leaders and to let them think about regional space and activities on regional Internet governance and regional financing system. Since the SAARC Summit was defered at that time , the outcome documents of this meeting were handed over to SAARC Sacratariat in Nepal. Following is the list of resolutions that was adopted in the Dhaka meeting.

Resolutions of Dhaka WSIS Consultations

After extensive discussion on ICT policy by participants from the government, civil society, private sector, academia and the media from the South Asian region, the WSIS Consultation meeting held in Dhaka, Bangladesh from 5-7 January 2005 under the auspices of the Bangladesh Friendship Education Society (BFES) and the Bangladesh Working Group on WSIS (in collaboration with APC and One World South Asia) resolves as follows:

The following issues should be drawn to the attention of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) at their next meeting:

That SAARC undertake a study on the establishment of a regional Internet exchange to connect the national Internet exchanges to contain regional traffic within South Asia in order to promote equitable regional trade in services and save on the cost of international connectivity and thereby enhance regional cooperation;

That SAARC consider the establishment of a regional registry for IP address allocations (SANIC) to ensure that IP addresses are fairly distributed in South Asia;

That SAARC recommend that South Asian member states develop a common approach to the issue of Internet Governance and Financial Mechanisms for ICTD during the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society which culminates in Tunis in November 2005;

That as part of this common approach to WSIS, consideration be given to the transformation of ICANN into a multi-stakeholder body accountable to the global community;

That expanding access to ICTs in South Asia in terms of the WSIS Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action is a global public good that enhances the value of global information networks and hence benefits everyone including developed countries. A Global Fund for ICTD should, therefore, be established to support the goal of increasing access to ICTs by 2015 and this should be recommended by South Asian member states at the WSIS Prepcom 2 in February 2005;

That SAARC should take inputs from South Asian member states, the private sector and civil society to formulate a regional e-strategy to implement the WSIS Plan of Action in South Asia as a whole;

That the regional e-strategy should adopt a regional public goods approach to financing ICTD which would explore the relationship between creating a development-oriented policy environment and the exploitation of existing and prospective financial mechanisms to enable ICTs for the achievement of the MDGs and poverty reduction targets in the region;

That SAARC should encourage multi-stakeholder participation by member states, the private sector and civil society in the UNDP/APDIP WSIS consultation process on Internet Governance as a way of raising awareness of the importance of Internet policy and governance in South Asia;

That SAARC should undertake specific programmes for mainstreaming ICTs in poverty alleviation strategies and achieving the MDGs through the integration of efforts undertaken by governments, the private sector and civil society in the region;

That SAARC should support initiatives to promote local content and languages on ICTs in South Asia;

That SAARC should seriously consider ways of integrating gender equality into ICT policy issues at the regional level;

That serious consideration should be given to the licensing of community radio stations by member states as a key component of an early warning system in response to the Tsunami tragedy in the region as well as community radios role in enabling development. Consideration should be given to best practices in community radio in the region such as those in Nepal;

That the regional e-strategy should consider the problems of implementation of ICT policy in the region and develop an approach to ensuring successful implementation of ICT policy at country level;

That SAARC should establish and fund a Regional ICT Forum to undertake these above-mentioned tasks and involve stakeholders from the private sector and civil society in the process.

Action Points from the ICT Policy Consultation on South Asian National Policy Issues.

Bangladesh ICT Policy Recommendations:

Need to review the policy for Bangladesh and country taking into ICT trends and to remove all the drawbacks that have been pointed out.

This policy review will look at issues of how gender, teledensity, creation of relevant and local content, and small and micro enterprise promotion, and the role of media can be included in this review and submitted to the Bangladesh govt.

This is based on the premise that the policy is open to review.

There is need for ownership of the process with a lead agency. So D-net E-policy Center, will take the lead on this front, in consultation with other CSOs such as BFES, BASIS, Katalyst, CPD, Bytes for All, BNNRC, Voices, PROSHIKA, Computer Barta, The Daily News, and others.

Other stake holders (such as, Grameen Communications, Bangladesh Computer Council, ISP Association in Bangladesh, Working Group on WSIS etc.) should also be invited.

APC Action Apps software can be used for developing the ICT policy portal.

The team should use open source mailing list groups for running the list (in order to promote free/open source).

South Asian Policy Recommendations:

21. ... They should consider aligning their aid and partnership strategies with the priorities of **set by** developing countries' national development strategies.

23 b. Communications access and connectivity for ICT **based** services ...;

25b. Identification and acknowledgement of the key role of ICTs in national **development** strategies, ...;

WSIS Regional Conference in Asia Pacific was held in Tehran, Iran from 31st May to 2nd of June, 2005 and the Secretary of MOSICT joined the conference on behalf of Bangladesh Government. In his paper to the plenary session, he summarized Bangladesh's position on the issue of Internet governance and financial mechanism and is available at: http://www.unescap.org/icstd/events/WSIS_2nd_Phase/docs/Tehran/Key_Note_addresses-Statements/Statement_by_Bangladsh.pdf But this document touches the issues very superficially and did not have clear explanation of role to different debate and discussion with regard to these issues. Due to scholarship unavailability, civil society entities from Bangladesh could not participate the meeting. The author of this report along with few other civil society groups attended the Tehran meeting. Though the participation was smaller, civil society groups made a critical voice on the regional action and the processes of this regional conference that did not uphold the value of multi-stakeholderism described in WSIS declaration. Civil society's response to this regional action plan is kept here:

http://www.unescap.org/icstd/events/WSIS_2nd_Phase/docs/Tehran/Civil_Societies_responses-Statements/Statement_by_Civil_Society.pdf

Development network (D-net – www.dnet-bangladesh.org) one of the Bangladeshi research organizations, prepared a possible position paper for the Government of Bangladesh to pursue steps in the 3rd PrepCom of Tunis Summit. This initiative was unique in two senses. First: this is for the first time, a research organization in Bangladesh is preparing a possible position paper that gives clear direction to Government. Second: It discusses the issues more elaboratively and with detailed inputs rather than any superficial tone. But like other civil society inputs earlier, this paper too was feeding Government activities and preparation rather than developing capacities of the civil societies itself. Developing capacities of different organizations and making them enable to raise critical voice probably would have been much more essential in the context of WSIS.

Anyway, the areas where D-net suggested a list of possible positions includes the following (Full paper can be found at: <http://www.dnet-bangladesh.org/ppwsis1.pdf>):

Part I: **Financial Mechanisms**

Issue # 1: Digital Solidarity Fund

Possible Position of Bangladeshi Delegation

- The strengthening of the DSF may be strongly supported in line with other developing countries
- The fund may be managed by developing countries in a democratic and participatory manner
- The WSIS Task Force on Financial Mechanisms (TFFM) should recognize and promote the Digital Solidarity Fund as a viable alternative sourcing of funding

Issue # 2: Funding Priority for Development of Locally Relevant Content

The Bangladeshi delegation may want to reinforce the importance of funding mechanisms of locally relevant content and to re-iterate the point that ICT infrastructure is only one piece of the ICT4D puzzle

Issue # 3: Funding for Development of Regional Internet Backbone

If issues of financing of regional Internet backbone comes up, specially in Asia, then Bangladesh delegation may want to endorse it

Issue # 4: Funding for ICT Infrastructure

The importance of providing funds to the public sector to develop ICT infrastructure must be emphasized since the private sector does not have priorities for equitable distribution of ICT infrastructure.

Part II: **Internet Governance**

Issue # 5: Accountability of ICANN, the global administrator body for the Internet

- the Bangladeshi delegation may want to support the following two positions:
 - o ICANN's internal structure should be re-vamped to allow for more democratization and participation by members of all countries
 - o ICANN should be made accountable to a global body rather than the US government

Issue # 6: Global Internet Pricing Policy

- The Bangladesh delegation may support the following positions:
 - o reduction of Internet inter-connection costs for poor countries
 - o some kind of regulation on Internet pricing

Part III: **Open Source Software and Technologies**

Issue # 7: Promotion of Open Source Software and Technologies

The Bangladeshi delegation may want to support the use and funding of open source technologies whenever appropriate for developing countries.

BFES along with Microsoft Bangladesh organized a round-table national consultation on WSIS in September 10th, 2005, prior to PrepCom 3 of Tunis phase. Different stakeholders including the representatives of government, media, civil society and private sector entities attended the event. The purpose of the meeting was to coordinate the inputs from all the key stakeholders and stimulate multi-actor cooperation. Different actors put different perspectives to this consultation and this consultation eventually turned out to be an opinion sharing session on current IT situation/status/problems of the country, rather than an event on WSIS. In that sense, it was not that very contributing to the ongoing debate and discussion of WSIS but was interesting in terms of getting all these people together and to hear from them.

Inputs from different stakeholders (Round table consultation 10th September, 2005)

The Government representatives stressed on the need of creating awareness among people on the power of ICT as it is the vehicle to travel virtually around the globe and keep oneself updated on the development of the world and able to establish own existence to others. Bangladesh can turn its huge population into capital of human resources by the help of ICT. GoB shared various initiatives that are already under process, those are - the ICT Ministry would submit a draft of ICT Law to the parliament at the end September 2005; government has taken the effort to establish a Hi-Tech park; in 2003, GoB took the decision to include a course on ICT especially in computer literacy at the Secondary and Higher Secondary education level. GoB has established an ICT training institute in collaboration with Korea where GoB officers will be trained.

The **Civil Society** highlighted the problems and potential of this sector. As ICT is not a static subject it is improved everyday, competencies should be developed to control and utilize it to reap of the benefits. The civil society urged the GoB for developing a national action plan for reducing the digital divide based on ICT policy. The action plan will have clear guideline on how to use ICT for poverty reduction besides economic development; suitable infrastructure needs to be established for the effective implementation of the action plan.

Being one of the stakeholders, the **Media** representatives assured of their role in raising awareness among all WSIS stakeholders for creating partnerships for ensuring a smooth coordinated effort to utilize this unique opportunity. Both the electronic and print media upheld its role of creating awareness and interests among general people by capturing and disseminating the success stories.

As one of the key stakeholders of WSIS, **Private Sector** would play an active role in partnership with Government as well as the civil society; it is the important actor who would develop the economically viable model and value added services to achieve the national goals. In explaining the importance of ICT, Private sector termed it as the engine for national development. The sector expressed that the industries must bear the commitment towards the society by helping in creating knowledge based society. It underscored the importance of e-governance though the government and the sector itself are far from the e-governance. For the Growth of the ICT sector, Government's support is required to create an ICT business enable environment. Establishment of an ICT Entrepreneur Institute in Bangladesh was also demanded.

The UN representative in the charge of ICT4D in Bangladesh pointed out the present position of Bangladesh; the country does not have a planned position. All the sectors are not well coordinated, which is very important for WSIS. For capturing the opportunities of the WSIS Tunis phase, specific and coordinated efforts are to be made.

Source: <http://www.itu.int/wsis/docs2/pc3/contributions/co91.pdf>

Most contested area of debate and discussion during the second summit phase was that of Internet governance. The report of working group of Internet governance (WGIG) was not received with consensus. A small number of large developing countries – some acting as a 'like minded' bloc – challenged the status quo, particularly perceived American control of ICANN and the root server system. The United States and a group of supporting countries resisted. The European Union took a third line, widely seen as a break with the United States, built around enhanced coordination of Internet governance processes. Bangladesh supported the position of creation of a new body – Internet Governance Forum suggested by the working group on Internet governance to discuss issues related to Internet governance. As part of LDC caucus Bangladesh held an important meeting with some of other LDC countries and proposed some changes of text that go in favour of the LDC countries. One of text proposed by Bangladesh was very important and was supported by 30 other countries to be adopted in the final document was:

72 [g) Encouraging relevant parties to commercially negotiate reduced interconnection costs for LDCs and other countries mentioned in the Geneva Declaration of Principles, taking into account the special constraints of LDCs.]

Bangladesh also proposed that, for each country Government could play important role to implement Internet Governance along with Stakeholders. The government is the key player to implement Internet governance.

MOSICT of Bangladesh Government with support from UNDP Bangladesh organized an international event – Road to Tunis in October 2005 prior to Tunis event and invited around 100 high level representatives from the ICT industry, government, civil society, academia and private sector from over 40 countries. It eventually turned out to be a grandiose event and following is the declaration that was adopted in this Dhaka meeting.

DHAKA DECLARATION: Building an Information Society : Road 2 Tunis

We, the ICT stakeholders representing Governments, Private Sector, Academia and the Civil Society, having come from six continents of the world, assembled in Dhaka, Bangladesh from 23 to 25 October 2005 in an International Workshop entitled “Building an Information Society : Road 2 Tunis”, organized under the auspices of the Ministry of Science and Information & Communication Technology, Government of Bangladesh in collaboration with UNDP Bangladesh and in association with World Summit Award (WSA), Austria;

after extensive deliberations on the issues of e-governance, transparency & accountability, public and private sector partnership, internet governance, security vis-à-vis privacy, e-content & creativity, holistic ICT education & training for all, rural & universal ICT access, ICT4D leading to poverty alleviation and inclusion of women, children, the underprivileged & people with disabilities as well as the financing aspects of the solidarity fund;

hereby declare our common desire and commitment to build a free multi-stakeholder, people-centric, inclusive and development-oriented knowledge based Information Society in the world at large: :

emphasizing that a primary aim of the Information Society must be to provide basic information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure to people to facilitate full utilization of ICT at all levels in society including the grass roots and hence enable the sharing of social and economic benefits by all by means of ubiquitous access to information networks, while preserving cultural diversity and heritage of humankind all over the world;

endorsing the important role that ICT can play in achieving the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which describe a fundamental set of principles and guidelines for combating poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation and gender inequality;

recognizing that the concept of a knowledge-based Information Society is one in which affordable access to information & communication technology through content in accessible language and formats can help people achieve their full potential, promote sustainable economic and social development, facilitate participatory decision-making processes in sustaining democracy and good governance and improving quality of life for all;

appreciating the efforts of the UN in convening the WSIS and of the ITU in implementing the summit in two phases, Geneva 2003 - Tunis 2005 and committing ourselves to the Declared Principles and Plan of Action at the Geneva Phase of the Summit and leading to the Tunis Phase of WSIS.

This Dhaka Declaration adopted at the conclusion of the International Workshop entitled “Building an Information Society : Road 2 Tunis” 23-25 October 2005, Dhaka, Bangladesh and is submitted as input to the Second Phase of the WSIS in Tunis during 16-18 November 2005 through the Secretary General of the ITU and will also be disseminated through governments, civil society, private sector, NGOs and the media.

Dhaka 25 October 2005

This declaration paid emphasis on millennium development goals (MDG) and digital solidarity fund. But it is unclear as to what have been the major outputs of this international event or what MOSICT and UNDP wanted to contribute to WSIS process by organizing this event. Tunis phase of the Summit was attended by a good number of Bangladesh delegates both from the Government, private sector and civil society. The Minister of MOSICT in Bangladesh gave a speech on plenary session 7th on the 18th November. The 'Tunis Commitment' adopted at the Tunis Summit made some reference (Ref. 21) to LDC countries, which was a result of effort from Bangladesh delegations in earlier Prepcoms.